SARAH WIGGLESWORTH AND JEREMY TILL

THE EVERYDAY AND ARCHITECTURE

You are reading these words, but first you have taken the smooth covers of the magazine in your hands, flicked them, released the dense aroma of printing ink, stopped at an image suffused with colour, moved to another imbued with lusciousness and now you are thinking: 'How can this be The Everyday?' Now look up, wriggle your toes, sense the presence of others who have occupied, are occupying or will occupy the space you are in. Focus: find those cracks through which time, dirt, fear, passion, event have entered to disturb the idealised, static, perfection of that space's conception. Now shut the magazine and turn it over. Hold that shiny cover in front of your face and worry whether that white mark is a speck of dirt on the surface or a spot on your face. Relieve that worry by bending the cover, distorting the space beyond and your image occupying it.

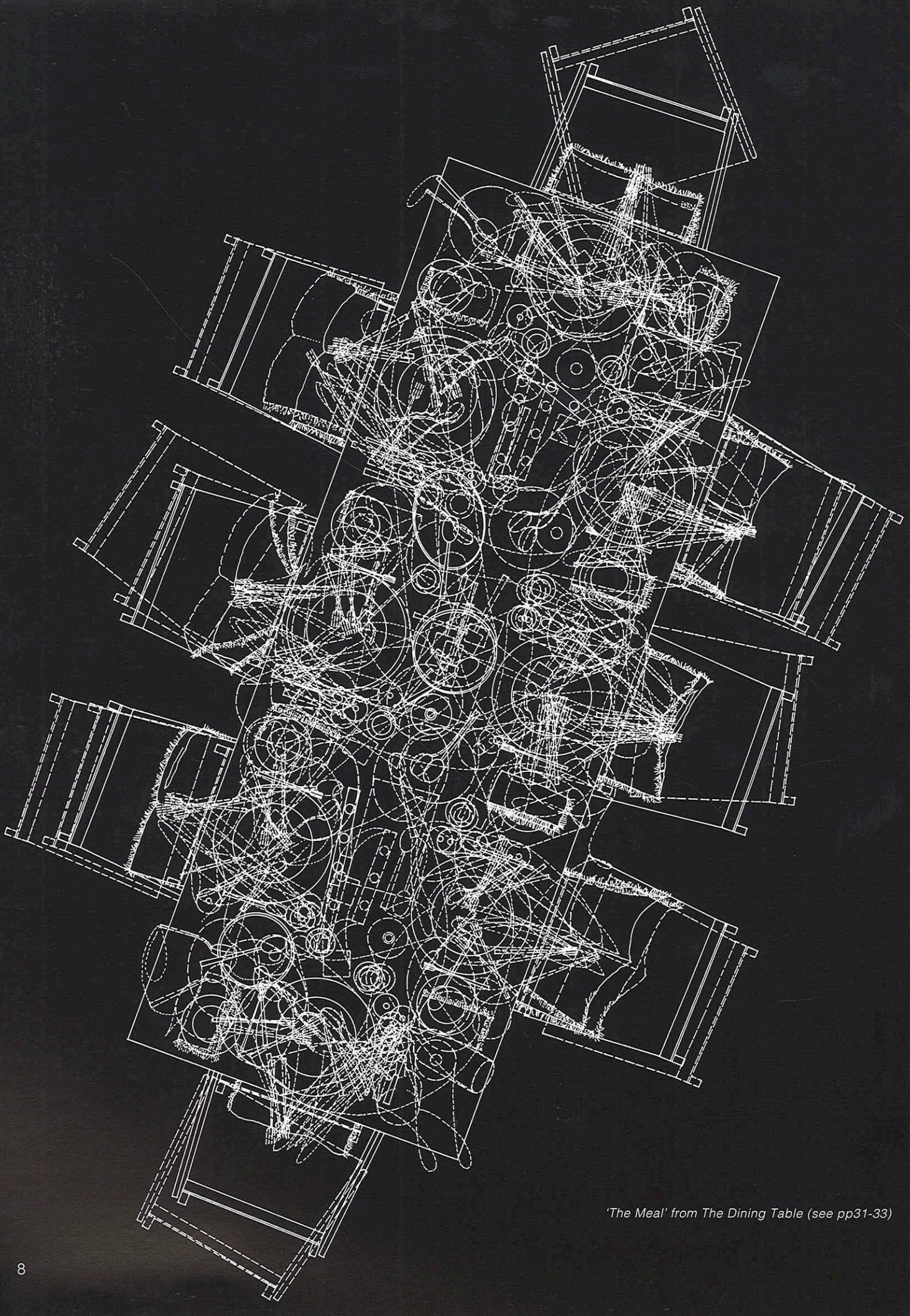
This issue of *Architectural Design* attempts to capture the fragility of that distorted reflection, where image and reality blur. It accepts that the everyday will rush in to disturb the impossible vanity and perfection of architecture, but sees this action as ultimately productive. Our tactic is not that of the hair-shirt puritan; we aim to seduce you with the gloss, and slip the world of the everyday in through the back door.

We first came to the everyday from the furthest shores of architecture. Conceived of as an island, this architecture concerns itself with internalised notions of form and style. Aesthetics and technology enter into an unholy alliance which allows the self-contained and self-referential languages of architecture continually to evolve. Occasionally boats arrive at this island, bringing with them fresh supplies of theory, geometry and technique which inject the flagging body of architecture with new life. It is not surprising that the architecture which is thereby created is obsessed with notions of the iconic, the one-off, the monumental. It privileges the final product over the process, the perfected moment of completion over the imperfections of occupation. It concerns itself with lofty ideals rather than gritty realism, searching for the next novelty whilst forgetting the present.

But of course we didn't really come to the everyday from the furthest shores of architecture. The everyday was always there, and we, like everyone else, were always immersed in it. To some extent it is this immersion which prevents us from seeing the everyday, or acknowledging it. But it is also from this immersion that specialised disciplines, among them architecture, attempt to escape. These disciplines require a distance from the ordinary in order to define themselves as something set apart and (crucially) thereby place themselves in a position to exert control and power. In this the profession of architecture is no different from any other profession. However, where it does differ is that its products, among them buildings, are inevitably involved in the vicissitudes of the everyday world. The problem arises when the actions of this world confront the isolated value system under which architecture is normally conceived – when repetitive practices occupy the one-off, when the humble street contains the monumental, when the minor event interrupts the grand narrative – when the kid with muddy boots drags herself across the pristine spaces of iconic modernism. Here the conceit is revealed. There is something inexorable about quotidian actions which architecture is helpless to resist. Any discipline which denies the everyday will be denied everyday, and for this reason high architecture is unravelled by the habitual and banal events which mark the passage of time. There is a thudding disappointment as a gap opens up between the image of architecture and the reality of its making and occupation.

Our aim in compiling this issue is to recognise what high architecture has previously suppressed (but was never able to exclude) by seeing the world from within rather than from above. We explicitly acknowledge the everyday as a productive context for the making, occupation and criticism of architecture. However, nowhere do we attempt to define the everyday. The word alone does enough, allowing anyone to find their own space within the generalised term. Henri Lefebvre, the great philosopher of the everyday (and from whom much of our thinking develops), identifies the everyday as the residue left over when all the specialised activities have been removed. However, for us even this generalised definition sets up too oppositional a stance between the everyday and architecture (as a specialised activity). Whilst we may have introduced the everyday in distinction to high architecture, it is not our intention to get caught within the binary trap of remaining immersed in the ordinary. This would lead to the disavowal of architectural knowledge and creativity alike – knowledge because it is associated with the repressive structures of power and expertise, creativity because it is associated with uncritical genius. But this unequivocal disavowal leads to a disempowerment of user and architect alike. Instead, we suggest that the real productive potential for architects lies in an endless movement between engagement and retreat. Engagement as social beings (eating, farting, fucking), as users of spaces (and no different to the many other users of spaces), as political beings (where the personal is, as she says, political). Retreat to find an unburdened space in which to understand, to dream, to speculate. In this restless movement traditional oppositions of ideal/real, extraordinary/ordinary, universal/particular, special/everyday and so on, can never settle into a hierarchical order. Instead each member of the pair continually interprets and reformulates the other. Aspects of the world overlooked or suppressed by high architecture are thus allowed to flourish in a manner which captures the redemptive and creative potential of any act of making.

If we do not define the everyday, neither do we intend to propose an alternative aesthetic based on it. As soon as one reifies the everyday, it dissolves under the pressure of suddenly being special. The determinist turning of concept into form brings with it all the dangers of commodification and aestheticisation



'The Meal' from The Dining Table (see pp31-33)

– a danger that we run the risk of in presenting this work within these luscious, flickable pages. However, it was never our intent to make the everyday an object of aesthetic focus. There is in this issue much more attention to the production and perception of the projects than there is to the product *per se*. It is for this reason that we did not call the issue *Architecture of the Everyday* – because that would subsume the term into the canon of architecture and suggest that architecture can represent the everyday in a reified manner. The title *The Everyday and Architecture* is meant to provide a broader context in which to place the discussion and production of architecture. Taken together, we hope that these contributions form a new awareness about how architecture may be perceived, received and made.

In compiling the issue, we found as much stimulus outside the traditional architectural field as inside. One of the obvious characteristics of the everyday is that it does not adhere to fixed classifications – it is by its very nature interdisciplinary, dissolving barriers as it passes through. Seen in a quotidian light, away from formal categories, the work of artists, writers, performers, furniture designers, and so on is absolutely relevant to architectural production. It is for this reason that we have included such work in the issue. We invited all the architects in the issue to relate their work to the general theme; the result is a critical exegesis of the process of arriving at the work rather than mere description. Led by the everyday, the compilation ranges across disciplines and melds theory with practice; for us this is a touchstone of what constitutes architectural production.

The issue is notionally divided into three sections, though these are not meant as fixed categorisations. The first section, *The (Extra)Ordinary*, deals with what is there already – the overlooked, the familiar – as opposed to what *may* be there in some kind of utopian idyll. In conventional architectural discourse these territories are overlooked precisely because they challenge the paradigms that discourse is founded upon: breeze blocks, urban backlands, dilapidated dwellings, caravans, dining tables – none of these normally appeal at an intellectual or aesthetic level. Yet these, and other, spaces of the familiar are there to be claimed and transformed into settings of extraordinary potential.

The same is true of the domestic, the place which accrues habits, disorder, stains and (traditionally) the 'volatile' lives of women and children. The domestic as a reality is an affront to normative architectural orders. So, in canonic architecture, the domestic is squeezed of any life; it is framed, ordered, set behind glass for male inspection, contorted into formal games, technicised. However, any image of control thereby created is illusory; the contingent forces of the domestic everyday are too powerful to be so suppressed. A tragic illustration of this was provided in Martin Parr's recent television series, *Signs of the Times*, which portrayed domestic interiors together with their creators. In one episode an architect describes himself as being 'under siege' as the children introduce 'rogue elements' (ie toys) into *his* interior; on the sidelines his wife privately admits her anguish at being forbidden to hang curtains. In this issue, we have encouraged such rogue elements and evidence of domestic commonplaces appear throughout.

The second section, *Making the Everyday*, brings together projects which extend the material language of architecture. It is absolutely not our intention to present the work as a fresh kind of look or as another product to be appropriated as an aesthetic. There is a tendency of some architects and artists to seize upon the contemporary world of everyday objects and turn it into a new style. Such a superficial celebration acts as a mask which deflects critical attention from the underlying forces which have shaped the production of those objects. In contrast the projects presented here do not champion the aesthetic as the end in itself, but the way that things look evolves as a result of various processes and materials of making. If there is a common language, it is one that raids the catalogues and cultural repositories outside the incredibly limited palette of conventional architecture. The fourfold appearance of straw bales is indicative of this – a happy coincidence of connections which emerged during final editing.

The final section, *Using the Everyday*, looks at how the occupation of architecture, both potential and actual, affects its production. Here the word production is used in the widest sense to incorporate the way that users themselves are producers of space. Many of the projects in this final section are for people who because of their class, race, or economic status are seen on the margins of dominant society. With all their political connotations, these margins have never been sufficiently accommodated by the values of mainstream architecture – values which too often hide behind an aesthetic mask of supposed objectivity and neutrality. In contrast, an acknowledgement of the everyday, with its engaged actions and occupations, inevitably leads to a recognition of the political and social content of architectural production. The projects in the final section suggest that in order to address these overlooked aspects, new methods of working need to be employed. They replace a prescriptive methodology or overarching strategy, with a diverse set of tactics of resistance and empowerment.

The issue opens with an elegiac piece by Greil Marcus, which could serve as an introduction to the issue as a whole. One response to reading Marcus' description of his home street is to think: 'Hey, it would be great to visit Panoramic Way next time we are in San Francisco.' That would be to miss the point altogether, because the world that Marcus (and the other contributors) opens up can be found in your street as well.

Bibliographical Note

The themes touched upon above are more fully developed in some of our other writings, most specifically: Jeremy Till, 'Angels with Dirty Faces', *Scroope*, University of Cambridge (Cambridge), 1995, vol 7, pp13-17; Jeremy Till, 'Architecture in Space, Time', in Clare Melhuish (ed), *Architecture and Anthropology*, *Architectural Design*, Academy Editions (London), vol 124, November 1996; Sarah Wigglesworth, 'Domesti-city: Reflections on Commonplaces', *Proceedings of ACSA Dallas Conference*, ACSA Publications (Washington) 1996; Sarah Wigglesworth, 'Maison de Verre: Sections through an in-vitro conception', *Journal of Architecture*, E & N Spon (London), forthcoming.

These articles also refer to two guiding authors: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Verso (London and New York), 1991 and *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Transaction (New Brunswick and London), 1994 and Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London), 1984.

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TABLE MANNERS

Four stories; four different narratives about a project whose subject is the relationship between work and home.

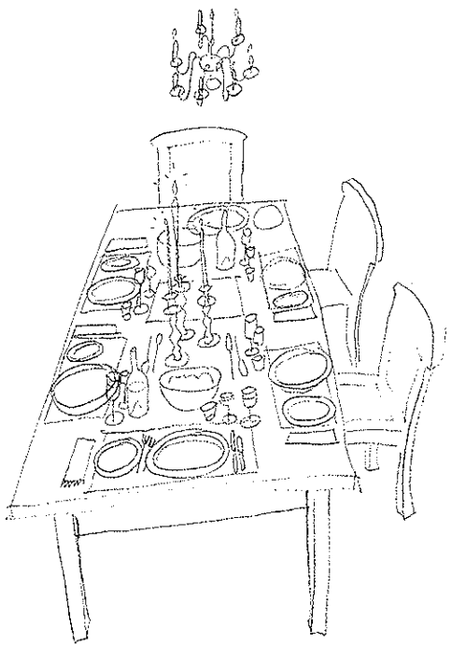
Story 1. The Dining Table

Faced with a blank sheet of paper and a couple of buildings to design, where do you start? Any novelist will tell you: write about what you know. What we know is that living and working from the same building means our two lives (work and home) are never easily distinguished, but rather are irrevocably intertwined. An architect's response to this might be: separate the two physically; clarify zones; keep activities distinct; apply order. The person who lives and works there knows this is impossible. The Dining Table shows why.

The Dining Table sits in the centre of our 'parlour', the front room of our terraced house. On it stand items of everyday domestic use such as salt cellar and pepper mill, vases of flowers, fruit bowl and candlesticks. On an average day it collects the detritus of domestic life: letters and mailshots, magazines, keys, bike lights and small change. At regular intervals it becomes the site for meals, gathering over time the marks of the food and drink spilled on its surface. At other times it is the venue for office meetings, because our office is not large enough to accommodate more than four people. At such times it is to be found scattered with pieces of paper, models, drawings, pens and other evidence of office life. The surface retains the patina of time, the traces of past events indelibly etched into the surface. At no time can the Dining Table be said exclusively to represent one side of life more than another. This ambiguity is an essential motif in the reinvention of the new house and office. In this process, the Dining Table itself is the starting point for the project, acting as a trope for the design of spaces which inscribe home and work simultaneously.

The Dining Room in the new scheme occupies a space which positions the table ambiguously between the house and the office, recognising the claims of both to the use of its surface. At times the space is used as a conference room for the office, the place of official business. At other times it can be united with the house and plays the role of the formal dining room.

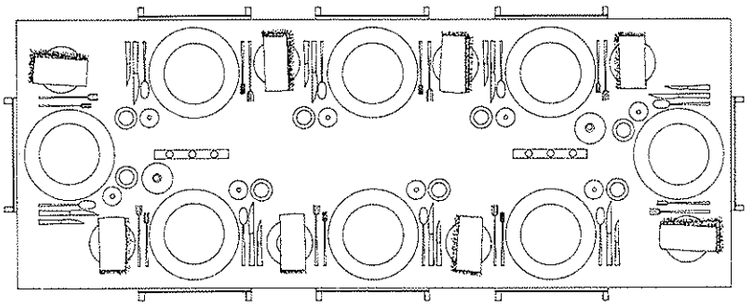
Above the table hangs a chandelier of broken milk bottles: discarded domestic artefacts fashioned into a status symbol. The chandelier signifies the formal nature of this space; yet as a mediating world it symbolises the conditions of real life, reminding us in the gentlest way that we have several identities, often co-existent.



Our Dining Table

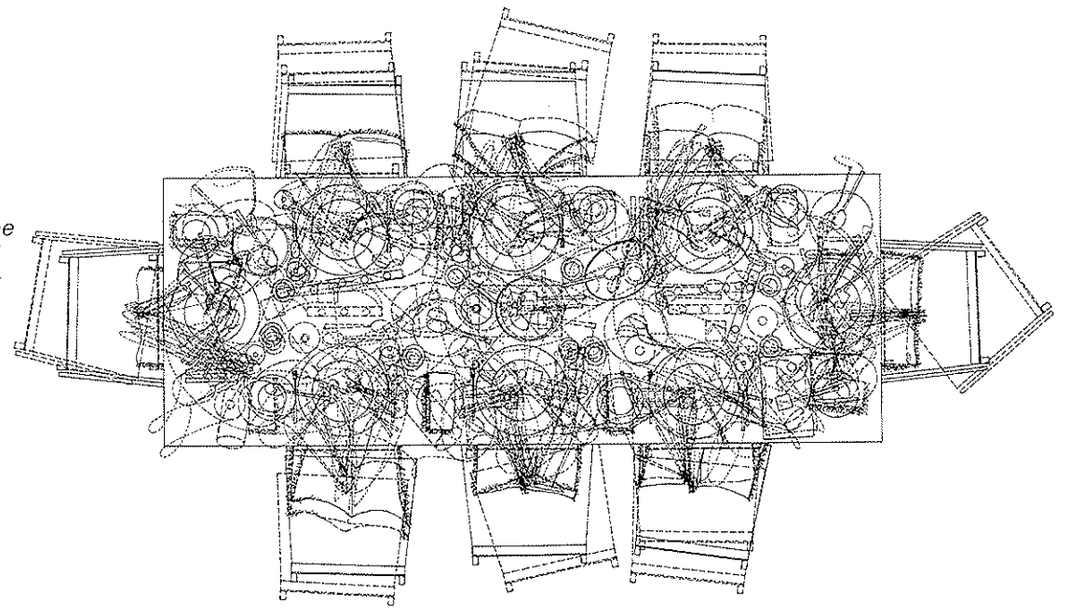
The Lay of the Table

An architectural ordering of place, status and function
A frozen moment of perfection.



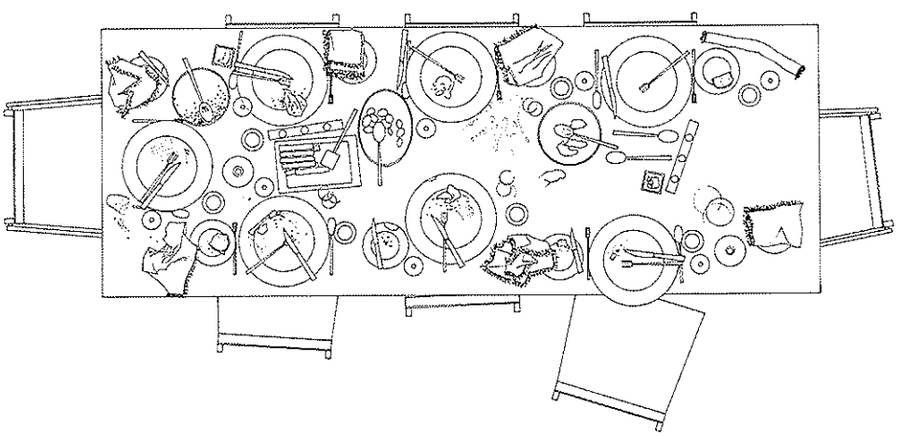
The Meal

Use begins to undermine the apparent stability of the (architectural) order
Traces of occupation in time
The recognition of life's disorder.



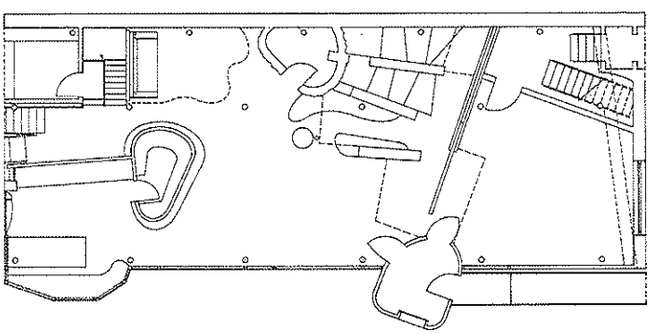
The Trace

The dirty tablecloth, witness of disorder
Between space and time
The palimpsest.

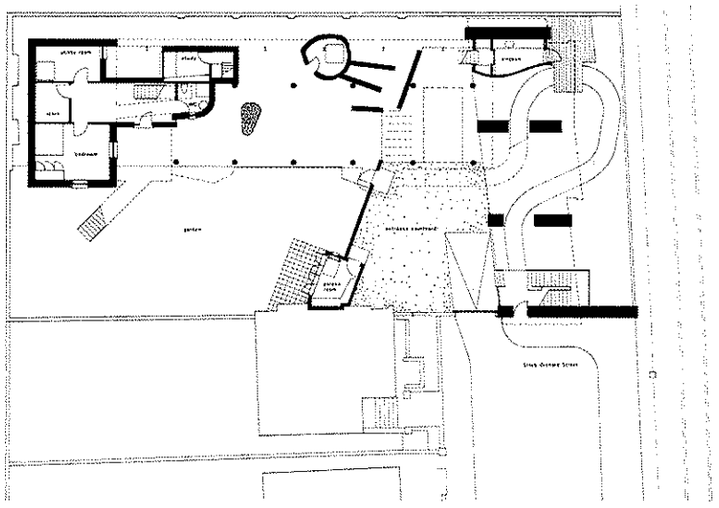


The Lay of the Plan

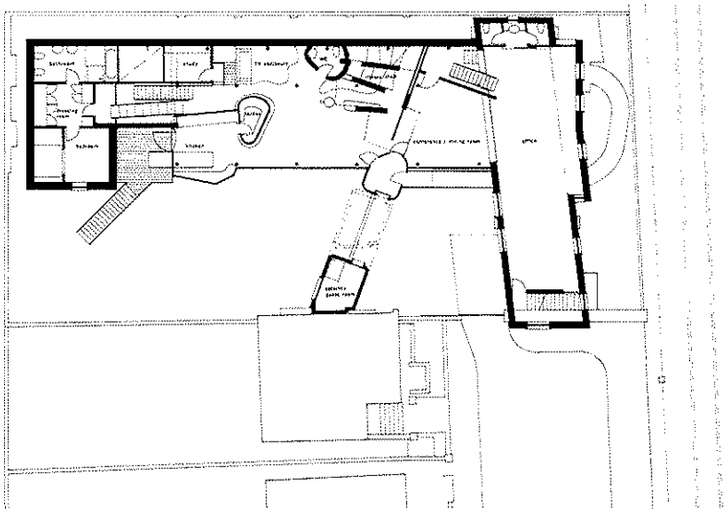
Recognition of an/other system of order
Domestic clutter filling the plan(e).



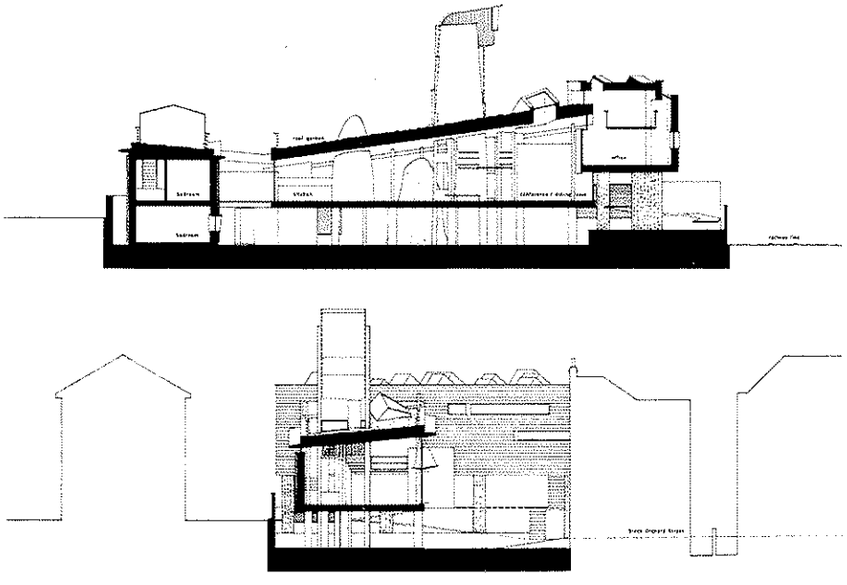
These four drawings are an exploration of the idea of order in architecture. They document the transformation of the plane of the ordered dining table into the plan of the house. The sequence begins with the table in readiness for an evening meal.



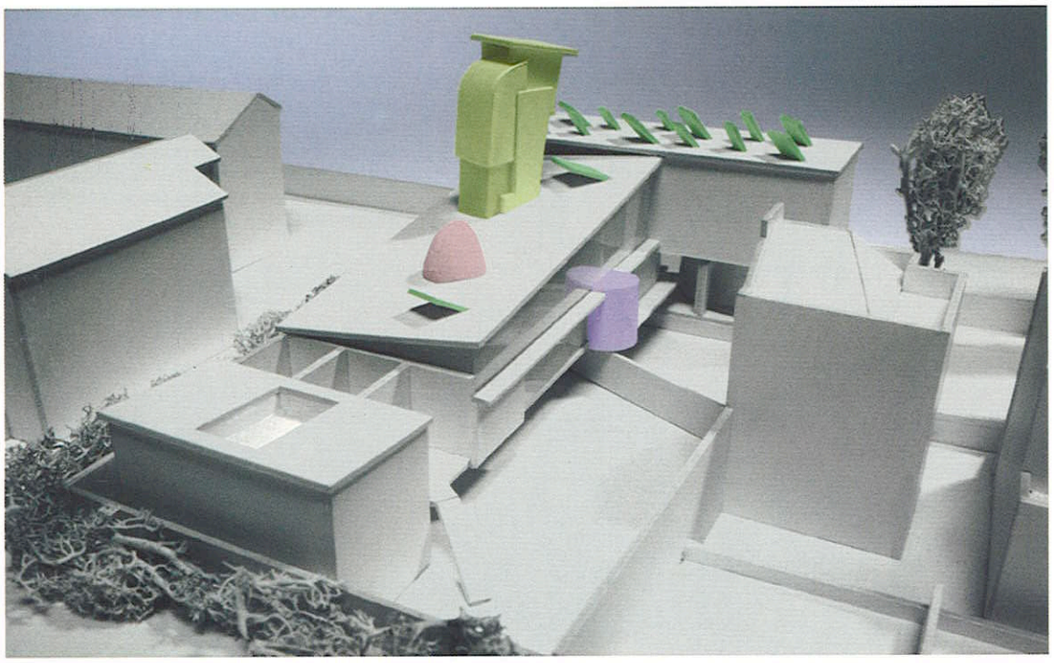
Ground Floor Plan
Open space under the floor plan of the house. Chickens foraging in the bark chips. Rude nature and a pile of compost amongst a grid of columns. The rhythm of residual party walls held captive in wire cages. A ramp which pauses to register the 10.05 to Edinburgh as it passes the trembling train spotting terrace. Bike sheds and back doors.

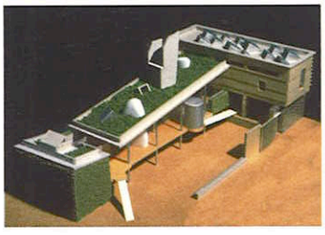


First Floor Plan
Bürolandschaft *for the home. Attic loft for the office. Dining/Conference room as hall. Shiny columns against furry blobs and hairy walls. Cooling larder and warming hearth. A sandbag wall peels away to give momentary glimpses of whistling trains. Narnian wardrobe as a place of transition. The plan comes to rest as we go to bed. Guests docking with the lobby Mir-style; sliding like a snail back along the garden wall. No slimy trails.*



Section
A bed inside a cupboard. Planes punctured by projections. Wild strawberries growing on a tilted roof. A tower whose bricks are books, demanding exertion. A lookout post, a signal box, whose roof slips away under starry skies. A ramp climbing through ruined walls.





FROM ABOVE: View of model showing building in context; view of model with strawbale wall; view of model

Story 2. Technologies of the Everyday

The technology of building is assumed to 'progress' towards increasing sophistication. The meaning of sophistication is: greater reliance on Western, energy-rich, complex, industrialised processes. It is not considered progressive to use resource-spare, readily-available by-products from existing industries. Technology transfer is alright as long as it is a transfer to architecture from industries like aeronautical engineering, boat building or nanotechnology: cutting-edge manufacturing to which earthbound architecture aspires.

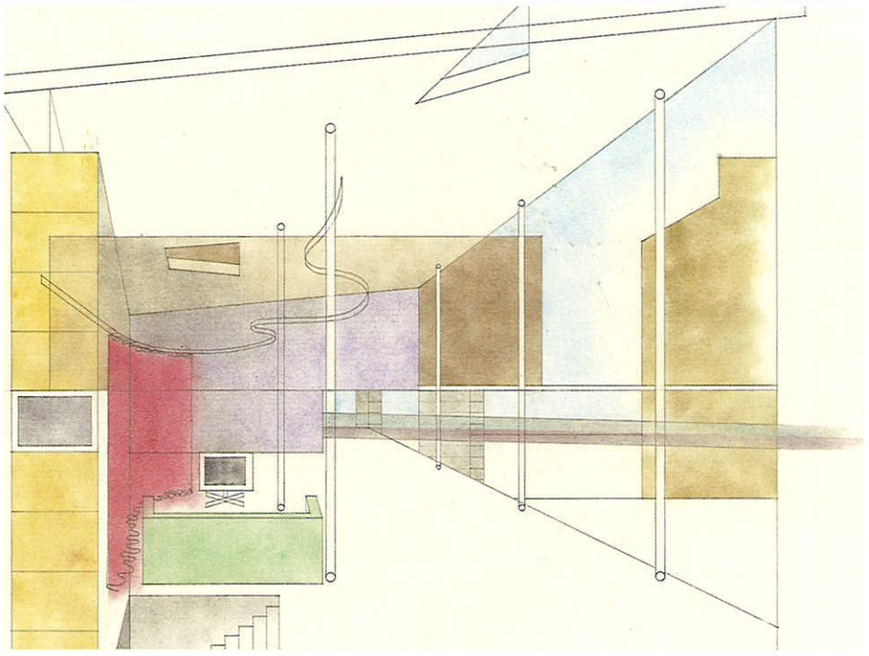
In contrast, all the innovative forms of building used in the house and office come under the category we have named 'reverse technology transfer'. In this transaction we adopt deliberately simple technologies to show how architecture has locked itself into patterns of thinking which are inscribed into its ideology and its legal codes (building regulations, for example). Our technologies are obvious and easy to construct; they can be performed by people without great prior knowledge and they make use of existing and ready-at-hand materials. They are even fun.

Gabions The Office is a narrow strip of floorspace which sits on four thick walls made of gabions. Gabions are normally used as retaining walls alongside river banks or motorways, cages of galvanised steel wire into which are packed stones, rocks or, in our case, lumps of concrete recycled from the site. They are physically too big for their job but why should engineering always be about the minimal? Why shouldn't it be about excess?

Sandbags The Office faces a main-line railway. The wall fronting the line is defended from this aural invasion, just as we did in wartime, by stacking sandbags against the force of the intruder. Civil defence authority hessian bags are filled with a mix of sand and a small amount of cement. After some months and some rain, the cement goes off. Later, when the hessian rots and falls away in shreds the form of the bag, complete with the imprint of the weave on its surface, remains.

Strawbales Thick, insulating and light to handle, straw bales are the perfect material with which to make a north wall. Strawbales wrap the house on these faces, coddling the bedroom wing from head to foot like a feather-filled coverlet. While they can be used as a load-bearing system, we are using them as infill between timber trusses. Both walling material and insulation rolled into one, the bales are clad in a rainscreen made of transparent polycarbonate, celebrating the beauty of the natural product. The tension between the roughness of the bales and the sleek exterior of the cling-film sheathing disturbs the normal architectural categories, uniting the slick with the hairy and the fetishised with the repressed.

The Duvet A cloth covering upholsters the office like a chair, reuniting the domestic artefact with the place of work. Puckered and buttoned, the external and internal are elided. Non-stick cloth. Silicone implanted fibres. Behind its apparent fluidity and weightlessness, the solid walls of the office resist the vibration of the trains passing by.



Watching the world go by

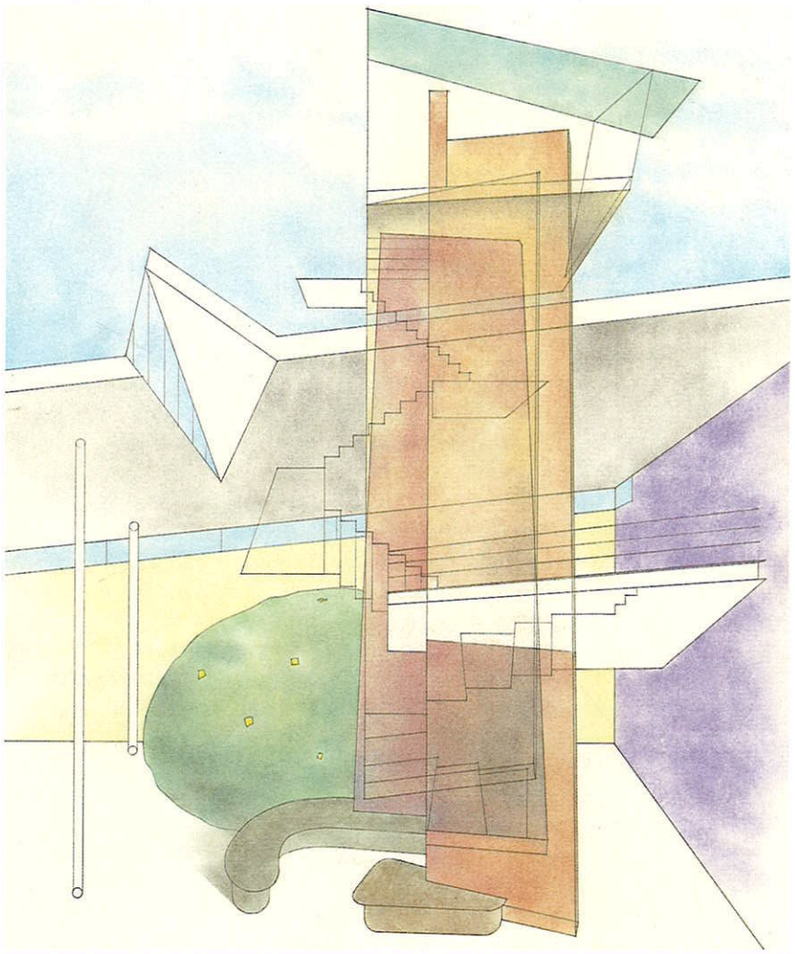
Story 3. Watching the World Go By

We are already living in the house we have yet to build. Constructed only through drawings, space and events compacted in our head. Straight ahead a television, that old 'window to the world'. But the velvet curtain is pulled back, so attention is distracted, views shifted. To the left, a housing estate caught in the deep reveal; he's doing his hair again, silhouetted against bobbly glass. To the right, picture windows picture the street; the new milkman looking for a doorstep. Ahead the office is suspended, waiting. Escape its presence upwards, through the rooflight and join the passing plane on its way to holiday romance. And through it all a train passes. It is the 10.05, the Edinburgh one.

Story 4. Scaling the Library

Stack of books. Worry about how to order them. Chronologically? Oldest at the bottom, like archaeology? Alphabetically? But Zola is a favourite and too long a climb. Thematically? But what is to be at the top, floating us heavenward, books of dreams or books of thoughts?

Start to climb, past the rude green lump, lights caught in its rough surface. The window salesman is in there, panicking at the waterless loo, confronting his own shit. Up past the balcony, cello waiting to learn to play. On up perforated stairs, criss-crossing between work and play. Through the roof, head level with the meadow, scorched in the sun. Room at the top still looks funny, leaning towards the trains. We have the timetables up there, a little joke. And at night, the roof draws back and we lie on the single bed, starwards.



Scaling the library